

## Aggie Players' 'Lullaby' production promises revue of Broadway's best

by Timm Doolen  
The Battalion

The Aggie Players are almost always sure to provide an evening of quality entertainment for a reasonable price, and that's exactly what they deliver with their current production "The Lullaby of Broadway."

This is not a play or a musical in the traditional sense, but rather a revue of songs from the stages of Broadway throughout the past 70 years or so. The numbers are loosely wrapped in the dreams of a young boy, played by Brian Crano.

Of course with just a little over two and a half hours, it's impossible to provide a thorough retrospective of the hundreds (maybe thousands) of musicals that have appeared on the stage over the past decades. Nonetheless, "Lullaby" is a worthy attempt to hit the highlights of several (22) of the mainstream Broadway productions.

As an Aggie Players production, the quality of the singing was much better than I expected. The standout of the night was the performance by Sombra Davis as Christine in four numbers from "Phantom of the Opera." The ultra-high note on "Think of Me" was ear-shattering, and right on pitch.

Her performance was complemented wonderfully by the rich voice of Mark Anthony Sterling, who also deserves credit as the director of the production.

But the truly unsung hero is Anna Leslie, the choreographer. Almost every number was choreographed in some way - more than half of them with at least some sort of group dance numbers. All of them were at worst entertaining, and at best visually stunning on the small Fallout Theater stage.

One of the best choreographed, and funniest numbers was "Summer Nights," one of the two numbers from "Grease."

Over the course of the revue, the group pieces usually stood out, probably because the canned background music was both pitiful and soft, so the greater number of voices drowned out the paltry music.

Of the ensemble songs, the male pieces were more memorable, such as "Luck Be a Lady" from "Guys and Dolls" and the beautifully touching "Bui Doi," from "Miss Saigon," which describes the plight of Vietnamese children that American soldiers helped conceive, but left behind in Vietnam when returning home. "They are the living reminders of all the



BILLY MORAN/The Battalion

Lisa Wood of the Aggie Players sings "Matchmaker, Matchmaker" from *Fiddler on the Roof* in a performance of "The Lullaby of Broadway" in the Fallout Theater.

good we failed to do," sings Mike Whiteside in a sentimental reminder of the problems of children "whose crime was being born."

Also from Miss Saigon was a wonderful performance by Tonya Cochran of "Movie in My Mind" which was ironically counterpointed with the all-male "There Is Nothing Like a Dame" from South Pacific, a radically different musical about a much previous war (World War II) in Asia. In Rodgers and Hammerstein's "South Pacific," the guys sing about how they long to be with a woman; in "Miss Saigon," Cochran sings about having to surrender her body to American soldiers in Vietnam.

Not all the songs are perfect by any means. The young boy showed how bad he could sing on "You're Never Fully Dressed Without a Smile" from "Annie"; "Master of the House" proved hard to re-create with the humor or the singing of the professional productions of "Les Miserables"; and minor flaws in other numbers, such as "Friendship," "I Know Him So Well," "No One Is Alone" and "Never, Never Land" detracted from an otherwise sparkling set of songs.

Other songs were performed well, but seemed out of place without the surrounding story, especially the numbers from "Les Miserables." The brief lines of dialogue before most of the songs were helpful, but a good knowledge of the musicals the songs came from is a big help for anyone watching the performance.

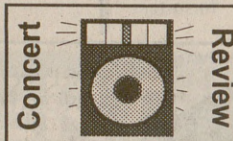
The two biggest questions I had about the production were the music (why couldn't it have been better?) and the size of the theater. They surely could have sold out Rudder Forum with their performances, which is a much nicer theater. It's nice to be in the quaint setting of the Fallout Theater in Blocker, but it's an odd experience to have more people on the stage (28 total cast members) than were in the audience.

The show is not without its ups and downs, but it is definitely a pleasing night's entertainment, especially to fans of musicals, and is well worth the \$5 ticket price.

"Lullaby" runs April 1-4 at 8 p.m. and April 4 at 2 p.m. also. Call 862-2052 for more information.



## Sexy sounds for sold-out show



By Matari Jones  
The Battalion

Explosive. Unrelenting. Powerful. These three words describe the performance of world-reknown saxophone player Branford Marsalis Saturday night in a sold-out concert in Rudder Auditorium hosted by the MSC Opera and Performing Arts Society.

Marsalis said listening to "Trio Jeepy" (his third album which earned him his fifth Grammy nomination) could never prepare you for this concert - and he was right. There were no patterns, no gimmicks, and no predictable moments - just pure melody in this very free-form performance.

The first composition of the evening, "G is for Groove" by the legendary jazz master Duke Ellington, exploded into a very powerful and emotional performance with Jeff Watts on drums and Robert Hurst on bass.

The band then followed with a furious and energetic 45-minute jazz suite of about four segued instrumentals. This set the tone for the entire show. The musical virtuosity, emotion and vibrancy of these talented artists filled the air.

The trio performed in a rock-steady bassist, interactive drummer style with a rich variety of tempos and moods as they laid down some irresistible, crazily impulsive grooves. There is no doubt that this trio works well together.

Marsalis touched the performance off in all the right places with his dynamic and melodic playing.

For Marsalis, the notes were easily and intensely wrung out of his sax on every chord and

every note. His one line blasts gave way to more fluid, mellow yet upbeat notes. Each Marsalis entrance was as strong and interjectionary as the first.

Hurst and Watts nearly stole the show with their electrifying super-extended duets as Marsalis would sit in the shadows at the back of the stage and sway and nod at their work.

It was sometimes questionable if Marsalis was the main attraction, since Watts nearly dominated the show with his somewhat overdrawn, yet thunderous and rhythmic drum solos. His polyrhythms enveloped the band while he played hard and harsh with his vibrant beats.

Watts performed as if his drumsticks were extensions of his hands. There was never a repeated, predictable or identifiable moment as he crazily smacked and caressed his drum kit. Watts played and he played hard - vigorously un-sentimental and vibrant.

With his resounding, deep and smooth bass interludes, Hurst added a funky and meditative alternative to Watts as he plucked out the themes.

An encore ended the concert with Duke Ellington's "Mood Indigo". This type of jazz was softer and subtler than the earlier performances and almost added a sexy blue mood to the evening.

The artists looked and acted as if they were having a good time the entire show. Even less-studied music lovers could revel in this evening of fantastic music.

Branford Marsalis definitely illustrated jazz at its finest. Listening to him was an excellent way to spend a Saturday evening.

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sophomore Leadership development

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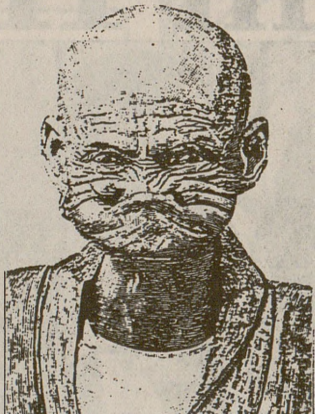
- work as assistants to the MSC President and Vice-Presidents
- work in the Student Development, Student Programs, Finance, Operations, Public Relations, and Development areas of the MSC
- develop leadership skills through group dynamics

#### Informational meeting:

Wednesday, April 1, 7PM, 401 Rudder  
Applications available Wednesday, March 25 in the  
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If you have a stupid human trick, an impersonation or unusual talent then you can be a part of A&M's Funniest People Contest. Come out April 1 to the MSC fountain from 11 to 2. Participants will receive a FREE 91-92 Video yearbook. Call AggieVision at 845-0458 or 823-2114 for sign up time & more information.

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